



**“An Essential Truths Issue Spotlight Prepared by
the Montana Public Education Center¹
September 6, 2013**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative

1. **What is the Common Core?** The Common Core State Standards Initiative (hereafter “Common Core”) is a set of academic standards for math and English originating through efforts of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. 46 states originally signed on to the Common Core and are moving toward aligning assessments to the new standards, either through participation in consortia or individually by state.
2. **What is the Status of Common Core in Montana?** The Montana Board of Public Education adopted the Common Core in replacement of then-existing content and performance standards for math and English upon recommendation of State Superintendent Denise Juneau. The standards were adopted effective November 2011. Assessments developed through the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, of which Montana is a member, are scheduled to formally begin in the spring of 2015. A practice test was made available starting May 29, 2013 and will remain available for use through the 2013-14 school year.
3. **What Are Others Saying About the Common Core – The Supporters**
 - a. [The Office of Public Instruction](#) has published a “myths and facts” paper that provides factual information regarding the Common Core standards and their adoption and intended use in Montana.
 - b. [The Fordham Institute](#) has a blog on its website devoted to reasons for support of the Common Core standards and also includes several insightful critiques of the arguments of those opposed to the Common Core. This is a particularly useful source of information, in that the Fordham Institute’s reputation as a conservative advocacy group is gold plated and could help some of the more conservative constituents in our communities see the positives of the Common Core from a perspective with which they are familiar and that they have historically trusted.
 - c. Other well-known conservatives who are on record as supporting the Common Core include [former Florida Governor Jeb Bush](#), who many see as the education reform movement’s chief architect, [New Jersey Governor Chris](#)

¹ The Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC) is a Montana resource for accurate, timely, and credible information about the great work of Montana’s public schools. MT-PEC is a joint initiative of the Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), MEA-MFT, Montana Rural Education Association (MREA), Montana Quality Education Coalition (MQEC), Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA), and School Administrators of Montana (SAM). Our Mission is “to increase public awareness of the essential truths regarding the great work of Montana’s Public Schools.” Our intended audience includes school board members and other policymakers, educators, community leaders, parents, and everyone interested in ensuring excellent public schools in Montana.

[Christie, Idaho State Superintendent Tom Luna](#) and noted [public education critic](#) and recently-retired University of Virginia Professor of Education and Humanities [Eric Hirsch](#).

- d. Common Core is also supported by the [Business Roundtable](#), an association of CEO's from leading U.S. companies that collectively comprise more than 1/3 of the total value of the U.S. Stock Market.

4. What Are Others Saying About the Common Core – The Primary Detractor in Montana

- a. [Montanans Against Common Core](#) is a self-professed “single issue education advocacy group” with a sole purpose of having the adoption of the Common Core in Montana reversed. And although the organization itself is ostensibly based on a single issue, it is being driven by the same people who have consistently advocated for unconstitutional and divisive legislation to privatize and profitize public education through vouchers, tax credits and charter schools without elected school boards. The rhetoric from this group on Common Core Standards is unusual to say the least, claiming in flyers for a presentation on Common Core by Montana Family Foundation lobbyist Debra Lamm that a connection exists between Common Core and the United Nations, UNESCO, the “New World Order,” Marxism, Globalism, Islam, etc., and that the Common Core is the culmination of an envisioned future of “dominant elites” who have been working behind the scenes for over 100 years to ensure its adoption.

5. What are the Facts Related to some of the Key Issues of Controversy in the Common Core?

- a. The perception that the Common Core standards are “politically-correct” and were developed by and/or are being driven by the Obama Administration.
Facts related to this element of controversy include:
 - i. The Common Core was developed through the cooperation of various state governors and state superintendents, not by Congress and not by the Obama Administration.
 - ii. The Obama Administration invited the incorrect perception that it was behind the Common Core by incorporating a proposed requirement of adoption of Common Core in order to remain eligible for Title I funding in its blueprint for ESEA reauthorization. That blueprint has not passed, however and is unlikely to be passed by Congress with a requirement of Common Core adoption.
 - iii. The Common Core does not require any particular curriculum. Additionally, the subject matters covered, consisting of math and English, are not susceptible to manipulation to a particular point of view as might be the case in history or social studies, for example.
- b. **The Perception that the Board of Public Education adopted the Common Core standards too hastily.** Although the Board did not convene a task force as it has done at times on other rules, the Board did hold informational meetings pertaining to the Common Core throughout the state over the

course of two years prior to adoption. Additionally, the State Superintendent consulted with math and English teachers and curriculum personnel on the Common Core prior to presentation of her recommendation for adoption to the Board of Public Education.

- c. The concern that there is no dedicated funding stream to help school districts address the Common Core. ***Facts related to this element of controversy include:***
 - i. There is no dedicated funding stream. The Office of Public Instruction requested \$34 million for schools to purchase the technology necessary to test students under the Common Core but the Montana Legislature denied that funding request during the 2013 Session.
 - ii. The gap in funding for the newly adopted Common Core standards in Montana implicates the state's compliance with its definition of the Basic System of Free Quality Schools in 20-9-309, MCA.
 - iii. Regardless of funding, the Board of Public Education has constitutional-based rulemaking authority, independent of supervision or control by the Legislative or Executive branches of government, when it comes to accreditation standards. And schools are obligated to comply with the accreditation standards in order to receive funding under current law.

6. Our Perspective

- a. MASBO, MEA-MFT, MREA, MTSBA, MQEC and SAM do have variations in our perspectives on Common Core but we are all supportive of and interested in increasing public and member awareness of what the Common Core is and in dispelling misleading statements of groups like the Montanans Against Common Core regarding this issue.
- b. We remain concerned regarding the gap between the costs of compliance with all accreditation standards adopted by the Board of Public Education, of which the Common Core is an important part, and the funding provided by the State to allow school districts to comply with such standards. The definition of the Basic System of Free Quality Schools in 20-9-309, MCA, requires adequate funding for school districts to, among other things, comply with the Accreditation Standards. The Accreditation Standards are specified as minimum standards upon which the Basic System of Free Quality Schools is built. With cost estimates for Common Core adoption in Montana running at around \$34 million for technology alone, and with no funding provided in the 2013 Session to allow all school districts to meet these new costs, there are significant challenges for our members in meaningfully complying with these new standards.
- c. Regardless of funding and other challenges, we know that our members expect us to and we will continue to work collaboratively in advocating for and defending the great work of Montana's public schools in delivering outstanding educational opportunities for all children in the state of Montana.